

Departing opener slams ‘racial stereotyping’

SYDNEY: Usman Khawaja said Friday he will retire from international cricket after the fifth and final Ashes clash against England, leaving a legacy as Australia's first Muslim Test cricketer while lashing out at perceived “racial stereotyping” during his 15-year career.

The 39-year-old will pad up for the last time, should he be selected, when the Test gets under way in Sydney on Sunday, ending months of speculation about his future.

It would be an 88th Test for the classy left-hander, culminating a career where it began after making his debut at the Sydney Cricket Ground in 2011, also against England.

“The number one emotion is contentment. I'm very lucky to have played so many games for Australia the way I have,” Khawaja said. “I hope I have inspired people along the way.

“I'm a proud Muslim coloured boy from Pakistan who was told that he would never play for the Australian cricket team. Look at me now, and you can do the same,” he added.

Khawaja immigrated to Australia from Islamabad as a child, battling the odds to become the country's first Pakistan-born, and first Muslim, national player.

At one point, he was the only Asian first-class player in Australia and is credited as a role model who opened doors for others.

“Usman has made a huge contribution to Australian cricket both through his outstanding achievements as one of our most stylish and resilient batters since his Test debut 15 years ago, and off field, particularly through the Usman Khawaja Foundation,” said Cricket Australia chief Todd Greenberg.

“On behalf of Australian cricket I would like to thank and congratulate Usman for all he has achieved.”

Khawaja's foundation helps youths from refugee, immigrant, Indigenous, and poor socioeconomic backgrounds through introductory cricket programs and educational support.

‘ATTACKED ME’

Khawaja, a qualified pilot, has plundered 6,206 runs in Test cricket with 16 centuries, averaging 43.39. He smashed a career-high 232 against Sri Lanka a year ago,



AUSTRALIAN opener Usman Khawaja doffs his cap as he leaves a press conference on Friday.—AFP

but has not made three figures since.

The current Ashes series has been a rollercoaster ride, with the veteran batsman coming under scrutiny.

He injured his back in the first Test in Perth and was replaced as opener in the second innings by Travis Head who blasted a match-winning century.

Khawaja did not feature in the next match at Brisbane and was omitted from the team for the third Test in Adelaide, only to get a lifeline when Steve Smith dropped out ill just before the toss.

He came in at number four and hit 82 and 40 before making 29 and zero in the fourth Test at Melbourne.

“When I did my back (in Perth), I hurt my back and had back spasms and it was something I couldn't control,” he said, while expressing frustration at how he was treated. “The way the media and past players came out and attacked me. I could have copped it for a couple of days but it went on for five days.

“The way everyone came out at me about my preparation, ‘he's not committed to the team. Only worried about himself. Playing a golf competition. He's selfish, he didn't train hard enough. He's lazy’.

“These are the same racial stereotypes (I thought we had moved past).

“But obviously we haven't fully moved past that. I haven't seen anyone treated like that in the Australian cricket team before.”

He nevertheless admitted the writing was on the wall during the current Ashes series.

“Going into Adelaide and then not being picked initially for that game was probably a sign for me to say ‘all right, it's time to move on,’” he said.

Khawaja also played 40 one-dayers and nine Twenty20 internationals.—AFP

Zimbabwe pick Taylor, Cremer for T20 World Cup

HARARE: All-rounder Sikandar Raza has been named captain of the Zimbabwe squad for the ICC T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka next month, while veteran batter Brendan Taylor and spinner Graeme Cremer have been included.

Taylor, who will turn 40 the day before the tournament starts, is expected to wear the wicket-keeper gloves, having recently come out of retirement after a three-and-a-half-year suspension for breaching the ICC's Anti-Corruption and Anti-Doping codes.

Leg-spinner Cremer, 39, also recently returned to the T20 team for November's triangular with Pakistan and Sri Lanka following a seven-year break.

Fit-again fast bowler Blessing Muzarabani is the only addition to the squad that competed in the triangular series.

Zimbabwe have been drawn in Group B at the T20 World Cup, where they will face Australia, Ireland, Oman and co-hosts Sri Lanka. The tournament runs from Feb 7 to March 8.

Squad: Sikandar Raza (captain), Brian Bennett, Ryan Burl, Graeme Cremer, Bradley Evans, Clive Madande, Tiotenda Masapo, Tadiwanashe Marumani, Wellington Masakadza, Tony Munyonga, Tashinga Musukuwa, Blessing Muzarabani, Dion Myers, Richard Ngarava, Brendan Taylor.—Reuters

called him a traitor, reports said on Friday.

NEW DELHI: Political tensions between India and Bangladesh spilled into the cricket field after Bollywood superstar Shahrukh Khan recently inducted Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman into his Indian Premier League (IPL) team Kolkata Knight Riders and a Hindutva politician

According to the *Hindustan Times*, opposition Congress party on Thursday condemned Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Sangeet Som's criticism of Shahrukh for inducting Mustafizur in his franchise. A former Uttar Pradesh MLA, Som targeted Shahrukh and called him



SYDNEY: England captain Ben Stokes (L) plays a shot next to team-mates Ben Duckett (R) and Harry Brook during a training session at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Friday.—AFP

Australia farewell Khawaja as England fight for scraps in final Ashes clash

SYDNEY: Triumphant Australia will bid farewell to Usman Khawaja as England look to recover another few scraps of pride when the Ashes series comes to a conclusion with the fifth Test in Sydney from Sunday.

Australia's 3-1 series lead has already ensured that they will retain the urn until they next travel to England, but Khawaja's announcement on Friday was a reminder that they might have a very different team by 2027.

The Pakistan-born lefthander said on Friday that the Sydney Test would be his international swansong — on the same ground and against the same opponents as his test debut in early 2011.

“As I walk off for the last time, I do so with gratitude and peace, or, as we say, salaam, grateful for the journey, the people, the lessons.” Khawaja suggested that Pat Cummins, who will miss the Test to man-

age his injured back, Steve Smith, who will again stand in as captain, as well as pace demon Mitchell Starc might not be too far behind him in bringing an end to their careers.

Local cricket fans, though, might be dwelling less on the long-term prospects of a team shorn of its thirtysomethings than the Sydney weather, which

Match starts at 4:30am (PST) on Sunday

has disrupted more than its fair share of Tests in recent years.

Storms are forecast for Sunday and some rain is expected on Monday, suggesting that the final Test might go into day five — the only match in what has been a frenetic series to do so.

That, and the fact that the SCG is traditionally expected to offer something for the spinners late in the Test, will be music to the ears of Australia's Todd Murphy.

Understudy to the injured Nathan Lyon, off spinner Murphy was recalled to the squad for the

Melbourne Test only to be left out of the team in favour of a four-pronged pace attack.

England, meanwhile, have called up spinner Shoaib Bashir and seamer Matthew Potts for the final Test with one of them set to fill the void created by Gus Atkinson's injury-induced absence.

Atkinson hurt his left hamstring during England's win in the fourth Test be the third English fast bowler — after Mark Wood and Jofra Archer — to have his Ashes campaign cut short by injury.

With the surface at the SCG traditionally assisting spinners, Bashir cannot take his 20th Test appearance for granted.

Chief curator Adam Lewis was hopeful the SCG test would extend into a fifth day.

“You want to see green tinge three days out,” Lewis said of the surface on Friday. “If you're not seeing any live grass three days out, then that's when (it's a worry) ... I'm really comfortable with where we're sitting.

“We had a little bit of sun this

morning. They're saying a bit more sun tomorrow. That will take the greenness out of the pitch. We're really happy with the pitches at the moment.”

England won that chaotic Melbourne Test inside two days — their first Test win in Australia since Khawaja's debut — to ease the barrage of criticism they faced after limply ceding hopes of wrestling back the urn in three heavy defeats.

The inquest into that debacle will continue long after the England squad returns home but opener Zak Crawley said that finishing the series with a 3-2 rather than a 4-1 deficit would be worth something.

“I think there's a big difference just internally in the group,” the batsman, England's top scorer in the series with 256 runs, said on Friday.

“It just shows a lot about our group and how united we are if we can get a win.”

England squad: Ben Stokes (captain), Shoaib Bashir, Jacob Bethell, Harry Brook, Brydon Carse, Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Will Jacks, Matthew Potts, Joe Root, Jamie Smith (wicket-keeper), Josh Tongue.—Reuters



AFGHANISTAN batter Uzairullah Niazi is cleaned up by Pakistan pacer Umar Zaib during their U-19 tri-series match at the Sunrise Sports Club on Friday.—courtesy Zimbabwe Cricket

SA go pace heavy for T20 showpiece

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa have selected wicket-keeper-batter Quinton de Kock, fast bowler Anrich Nortje and all-rounder Jason Smith in their squad for the T20 World Cup to be staged in India and Sri Lanka starting next month, but there is no place for Tristan Stubbs.

Aiden Markram will captain the side, which contains only two frontline spinners in George Linde and Keshav Maharaj, and will rely greatly on pace.

Kagiso Rabada has been included despite missing the last few months with injury, only returning to action in the last week.

Along with Nortje, he forms part of a pace line-up that also includes Marco Jansen, Corbin Bosch, Kwena Maphaka and Lungi Ngidi.

De Kock will likely open the batting after stepping out of retirement late last year, with powerful hitters David Miller, Dewald Brevis and Donovan Ferreira included.

But Stubbs has been left out after a run of

indifferent form, while Ryan Rickelton is also dropped.

“We are returning to the subcontinent, where we recently competed against hosts India,” coach Shukri Conrad said. “The experience we gained playing in those conditions will undoubtedly benefit us as we head into this tournament.

“Many of the players selected for the World Cup squad were on that trip and experienced first-hand the pitches that we will likely encounter and that will stand them in good stead once we get to India.”

South Africa are drawn in Group ‘D’ alongside Afghanistan, Canada, New Zealand and the United Arab Emirates, and will begin their campaign on February 9 against Canada in Ahmedabad.

South Africa squad: Aiden Markram (captain), Corbin Bosch, Dewald Brevis, Quinton de Kock, Tony de Zorzi, Donovan Ferreira, Marco Jansen, George Linde, Keshav Maharaj, Kwena Maphaka, David Miller, Lungi Ngidi, Anrich Nortje, Kagiso Rabada, Jason Smith.—Reuters

‘Positive signs’ on hospitalised Australian cricket great Martyn

SYDNEY: Former Australian Test batsman Damien Martyn is showing “positive signs” after being hospitalised in an induced coma with meningitis, ex-teammate Adam Gilchrist said.

The 54-year-old, who played 67 Tests between 1992 and 2006 and 208 one-day internationals, fell ill while lying down last week and was rushed to hospital.

He was diagnosed with meningitis — an inflammation of the membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord.

“Thank you everyone for the heartfelt love and wishes and care for Damien as he goes through a challenging time,” fellow Test great Gilchrist said during a Big Bash League game broadcast on Thursday evening. “He's still in hospital. There'll be more details coming out as they come to hand but certainly in the last 24 hours some positive signs are the indications coming out of the various tests he's having.”

A who's who of cricket greats have posted messages of support, including former England skipper Michael Vaughan and Indian legends Ravichandran Ashwin and VVS Laxman.

Known as one of the game's great strokemakers, Martyn became a key figure in Steve Waugh's all-powerful Australian side, hitting 13 centuries and averaging 46.37.

He was also part of the Australia team that won the 2003 ODI World Cup, cracking 88 not out in the final against India in a match-winning partnership with Ricky Ponting.

Martyn retired in 2006 during the Ashes series and had kept a low profile since.—AFP

India to tour Bangladesh in September

DHAKA: India's postponed six-match white-ball cricket tour of Bangladesh will take place in September, Bangladesh's Cricket Board said Friday.

The series, including three one-day and three T20 matches, originally due to be played in August 2025, was delayed after both countries' boards “mutually agreed to defer” the series.

India will now play three ODIs and three T20s between September 1 to 13.

The postponement last year came as political relations between India and neighbouring Bangladesh turned frosty, after a mass uprising in Dhaka in 2024 toppled then prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

Hasina fled to India, where she has remained, straining relations between Dhaka and New Delhi.

Bangladesh has repeatedly requested Hasina's extradition. She was sentenced to death in absentia in November for orchestrating a deadly crackdown on the uprising.

But New Delhi is also closely watching the upcoming elections on February 12, the first vote in the South Asian nation of 170 million people since the uprising.

On Wednesday, India's Foreign Minister Subrahmanya Jaishankar visited Bangladesh to attend the funeral of former leader Khaleda Zia, the most senior visit by an Indian official since the overthrow of Hasina.

Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) is widely seen as a frontrunner in elections, and her son Tarique Rahman, who returned last month after 17 years in exile, is seen as a potential prime minister if it wins a majority.

Bangladesh will also host series against Pakistan, New Zealand, Australia and the West Indies, across all three formats.—AFP

Shahrukh Khan gets flak over Bangladesh cricketer in KKR

By Our Correspondent

a “gaddar” (traitor) for backing the decision.

This is not unusual for the popular actor, who happens to be a Muslim. In fact, the Muslim movie star triumvirate of Sharukh, Salman Khan and Amir Khan have all faced allegations that they were anti-Hindu, pro-Pakistan or whatever else BJP supporters choose to call them.

Even the late acting leg-

end Dilip Kumar was also not spared.

The Mustafizur controversy erupted following the IPL 2026 auction, where KKR secured “The Fizz” for a staggering Rs92 million.

While the move was seen as a tactical masterstroke by cricket analysts, it also waded into a nationalistic backlash underway amid diplomatic tensions between

India and Bangladesh.

The controversy over Mustafizur being in Shahrukh's team is nicely timed with domestic election season in West Bengal where the BJP is threatening to topple secular Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in polls due by mid-year.

Mustafizur's selection to play for KKR has come amid allegations mostly by the Indian

right-wing over attacks on Hindus.

While calling Shahrukh a traitor, Som questioned him for investing money in a player “from a country working against India”.

The *Hindustan Times* quoted from a video clip of him as saying: “The way Hindus are being persecuted in Bangladesh, women and girls are being raped, their homes are

being burned, and anti-India slogans are being chanted there.

“Despite all this, traitors like Shahrukh Khan, I'm calling him a traitor because everything he has is given by India, given by the people of India, but where do they invest this money? They invest it in players from a country that is working against India. I want to tell people like Shahrukh that they

will not succeed.”

Congress MP Manickam Tagore, strongly condemning the “traitor” remarks, called the comments an “attack on India's pluralism” while saying that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) should stop “poisoning society”.

But Som was adamant. “Bahman won't be able to step outside the airport,” he said.